

no Ecclesiastical Disruption of the Empire.

his side. The protection of the Elector Frederick saved him from destruction, and Frederick was only one of many powerful supporters. The pope demanded in vain the enforcement of the edict from Diet after Diet (at Nürnberg in 1523, at Nürnberg again in 1524, at Spires in 1526). He was met with the counter-demand for the reformation of abuses (the *gravamina*), and, even if these Diets brought out the fact of the antagonism of a powerful Catholic party to Luther, they showed the determination of a growing party among the princes and the cities to stand by him. By 1526 Luther had a large following in South, Central, and Northern Germany, and had found intrepid missionaries among the ranks of his own order of the Augustines to preach it from the Alps to the Baltic. The Catholic party might organise itself in the League of Ratisbon-Dessau (July 1525). The Protestant party retorted with the League of Torgau-Magdeburg (June 1526), and this league could now count on the staunch support not only of the Elector John of Saxony and the Landgrave Philip of Hesse, but of the Dukes of Brunswick-Limeburg, the Duke of Brunswick-Grubenhagen, Duke Henry of Mecklenburg, Prince Wolfgang of Anhalt-Kothen, the Counts of Mansfield, Albrecht of Prussia, Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights, the Margrave of Brandenburg-Culmbach, Frederick of Denmark, who as Duke of Schleswig-Holstein was a member of the empire, a bishop even, George Polenz, bishop of Samland, and the cities of Bremen, Hamburg, Magdeburg, Nürnberg, Augsburg, Ulm, Constance, Strassburg, Luther had indeed, ecclesiastically, disrupted the empire, and the rent was destined not only to endure but to widen.

The fact was virtually recognised by the Diet of Spires (1526), which, instead of executing the Edict of Worms, as Charles demanded, decided that each prince should act in matters of religion as should appear accordant with his responsibility to God and the emperor, till a free General Council could be convened (Recess of Spires). This might be the toleration of expediency rather than of principle, but it was a virtual confession on the part of the Catholic party that Lutheranism had won for itself the right of recognition by the imperial Diet, and that the policy of repression was, in the circumstances, a hopeless policy. Assuredly an eloquent